

Budget and Caseload References

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Area Needing Improvement	FINAL REPORT: Budget and Caseload References
<p>Executive Summary</p>	<p>Pg. 2 With regard to the systemic factors, the State was determined to be in substantial conformity with the factors of Statewide Information System; Agency Responsiveness to the Community; and Foster and Adoptive Parent Licensing, Recruitment, and Retention. The State did not achieve substantial conformity with the systemic factors of Case Review System, Training, Service Array, and Quality Assurance System. Information from the Statewide Assessment and the stakeholder interviews conducted during the onsite CFSR attributes many of the current difficulties experienced by DHS to recent budget cuts in all areas of child welfare agency functioning. In recent years, funds available for services, training, quality assurance, and even maintenance of the management information system have been substantially reduced and there is an anticipation of further budget cuts in the future.</p> <p>Pg. 6 Case reviewers also determined that DHS was not consistently effective in assessing and meeting the service needs of children, parents, and foster parents or in involving children and parents in the case planning process. Stakeholders reported that the agency's use of some form of family group decision making in the case-planning process resulted in greater involvement of parents and children in the case planning process, but that caseworkers were not using this format on a consistent basis, primarily because of their excessively high caseloads.</p> <p>Information in the Statewide Assessment indicates that the State expected that the onsite CFSR would identify caseworker contacts with children and parents as areas needing improvement. According to the Statewide Assessment, severe budget cuts have significantly reduced the number of agency staff, which has resulted in very high caseloads that adversely impact the ability of caseworkers to establish face-to-face contact with parents and children.</p>

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<p>Executive Summary cont.</p>	<p>Pg. 9 Training</p> <p>The systemic factor of Training incorporates an assessment of the State’s new caseworker training program (item 32), ongoing training for child welfare agency staff (item 33), and training for foster and adoptive parents (item 34).</p> <p>Iowa is not in substantial conformity with the systemic factor of Training. Although the CFSR determined that the State has a well conceptualized and broad pre-service training curriculum for caseworkers, the training system is not functioning, as it should. Specifically, the ability of caseworkers to participate in training in a timely manner has been compromised due to reductions in the frequency of offering the training and the high caseloads that caseworkers carry. Furthermore, in the absence of a functioning quality assurance system, the agency is reliant on front-line supervisors to ensure quality casework, but no training is provided to assist them in this task. In addition, the CFSR found that opportunities for ongoing training are not readily available because of the 75 percent reduction in the agency’s budget allocated for training. Despite these concerns, the CFSR found that pre-service and ongoing training for foster and adoptive parents are perceived as being of high quality and readily accessible.</p> <p>Service Array</p> <p>The assessment of the systemic factor of Service Array addresses three questions: (1) Does the State have in place an array of services to meet the needs of children and families served by the child welfare agency (item 35)? (2) Are these services accessible to families and children throughout the State (item 36)? And (3) Can services be individualized to meet the unique needs of the children and family served by the child welfare agency (item 37)?</p> <p>Iowa is not in substantial conformity with the systemic factor of Service Array. The CFSR found that recent and severe budget cuts have resulted in significant reductions in the service array, leading to a number of critical services either being eliminated or sharply reduced. Consequently, even when services are available, there are long waiting lists. In addition,</p>
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Executive Summary cont.	services are not available in all areas of the State, particularly in rural areas. The CFSR determined that a lack of foster family or residential treatment services in some areas of the State often results in children being placed away from their home communities. Finally, the CFSR found that services are not routinely meeting the diverse needs of the children and families, primarily because the flexibility in designing services to meet individual needs has been significantly reduced due to budget cuts.
Item 2. Repeat maltreatment	Pg. 20 Stakeholders commenting on this issue reported that the agency has an extensive array of services to prevent repeat maltreatment, including immediate crisis intervention services and in-home counseling. They also expressed the opinion that the convening of Family Team Meetings at the onset of a case is effective in reducing the incidence of repeat maltreatment. However, stakeholders also expressed concern that recent budget cuts will reduce the availability of in-home services and Family Team Meetings.
Item 3. Services to family to protect child (ren) in home and prevent removal	Pg. 21 Most stakeholders commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR indicated that there is a large array of preventive and home-based services available to prevent children's removal from their homes or re-entry into foster care after reunification. Some stakeholders expressed concern, however, about the scarcity of substance abuse treatment services for parents and of services to support relative caregivers. Stakeholders in all counties indicated that recent budget cuts will further impact DHS' ability to provide services, particularly home-based services, to families.

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<p>Item 4. Risk of harm to child</p>	<p>Pg. 23 Several stakeholders commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR expressed the opinion that DHS is generally effective in addressing risk of harm to children and routinely conducts risk assessments and establishes safety plans. However, other stakeholders suggested that risk assessments were not sufficiently comprehensive to capture underlying issues that may contribute to risk of harm, such as domestic violence or mental illness. Stakeholders in Polk County, for example, voiced concern about the effectiveness of the risk assessment tool that is currently available to caseworkers and the extremely high caseloads that make it difficult for caseworkers to monitor families and assess risk on an ongoing basis. These stakeholders noted that because of large caseloads, the agency generally addresses risk by removing the children from home.</p> <p>In addition, several stakeholders expressed concern about the potential for risk of harm to children in foster care. They suggested that some children may be at risk in foster homes because there are too many children in the home or because the children's needs have not been adequately matched with the foster family's ability to meet needs. Again, stakeholders indicated that caseworkers' caseloads are too high to effectively monitor foster families.</p>
<p>Item 8. Reunification, Guardianship, or Permanent Placement with Relatives</p>	<p>Pg. 30 According to the Statewide Assessment, Iowa legislation to establish a subsidized guardianship was withdrawn shortly after enactment due to State budget shortfalls. It was expected that such a program would have aided older children in attaining permanency and supported relative placements for children with special needs.</p> <p>Stakeholders commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR noted that DHS engages in several practices designed to facilitate reunification, including (1) use of Family Team Meetings, (2) periodic case reviews, and (3) intensive services and supports for families. However, stakeholders also cited a number of barriers to timely reunification such as (1) high caseworker caseloads, (2) a high number of inexperienced caseworkers who are not skilled in engaging families, (3) court continuances, and (4) out-of county placements that inhibit visitation.</p>

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<p>Item 13. Visiting with parents and siblings in foster care</p>	<p>Pg. 38 Some stakeholders commenting on this item reported that the frequency of parents' visitation with children has been negatively impacted by caseworkers' extremely high caseloads, which makes it difficult for them to supervise visits. Stakeholders in one county noted that this problem is exacerbated by the fact that some foster parents are hesitant to have contact with biological parents during visitation due to safety concerns. In addition, although some stakeholders noted that visitation with siblings is encouraged, others reported that sibling visits rarely occur (e.g., twice a year).</p> <p><i>Determination and Discussion:</i> Item 13 was assigned an overall rating of Strength because in 85 percent of the applicable cases, reviewers determined that DHS made concerted efforts to ensure that visitation between parents and children and between siblings was of sufficient frequency to meet the needs of the child. However, information in the Statewide Assessment indicates that DHS believes that visitation is not as frequent as it should be because the high caseloads of agency caseworkers do not permit them to supervise visits and because funding to pay for supervision by private contractors has become increasingly unavailable.</p>
<p>Item 18. Child and family involvement in case planning</p>	<p>Pg. 46 Most stakeholders commenting on this item during the onsite CFSR expressed the opinion that parents and children are more likely to be involved in case planning when some form of family group decision making is used in developing the case plan than they are when this approach to case planning is not implemented. Other stakeholders suggested that the extent of family involvement varies by caseworker. All stakeholders were in agreement that the caseloads carried by most caseworkers, particularly caseworkers in Polk County, are too excessive to permit the caseworker to actively engage parents and children in case planning.</p> <p>This determination is consistent with information in the Statewide Assessment that involvement of parents and children in case planning is an area needing improvement. Quality Service Reviews (QSR) conducted by the State identified several barriers to family involvement in case planning including caseload size and frequent changes in DHS and</p>

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	provider staff.
Item 19 Caseworker visits with children	<p>Pg. 47 Stakeholders commenting on this issue were in general agreement that caseworkers are not visiting children often enough, although they noted that when there is a crisis, such as a threatened disruption of a foster care placement, caseworkers will visit the child and the foster family. Stakeholders also were in agreement that irregular visitation is the consequence of high caseworker case loads due to budget cuts. It was reported that caseworkers in one county have as many as 35 to 40 cases at a time. Because they do not have time to visit children, caseworkers tend to rely on other forms of contact or information provided by contracted service providers. Interviews with stakeholders also revealed that DHS personnel have conflicting perceptions of the visitation requirements and that there appears to be no clear policy pertaining to caseworker visits with children.</p>
Item 20. Caseworker visits with parents	<p>Pg. 48 Stakeholders commenting on the issue of caseworker contacts with parents were in general agreement that caseworkers generally do not have regular face-to-face contact with parents in either foster care cases or in-home services cases. Most stakeholders suggested that the excessive caseloads carried by caseworkers prohibit them from visiting parents as frequently as is necessary to further attainment of case goals. However, stakeholders also noted that the parents often have contact with various service providers and that the caseworkers rely on information from these service providers to supplement information obtained through their own contacts.</p> <p><i>Determination and Discussion:</i> Item 20 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement because in 77 percent of the applicable cases, reviewers determined that the frequency and/or quality of caseworker visits with parents were not sufficient to monitor the safety and well-being of the child or promote attainment of case goals. This determination is consistent with information in the Statewide Assessment indicating that, due to budget cuts, the number of trained staff is inadequate to ensure that caseworker contacts with parents can</p>

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	occur with the necessary frequency.
Item 21. Educational needs of the child	Pg. 50 <i>Determination and Discussion:</i> Item 21 was assigned an overall rating of Strength because in 93 percent of the applicable cases, reviewers determined that DHS had made diligent efforts to meet children's educational needs. According to the Statewide Assessment, Iowa has a strong history of good educational programs, and those strengths benefit children in foster care. This is despite the fact that the resources for both agencies have been subjected to budget cuts .
Item 24. State is operating a Statewide information system that, at a minimum, can readily identify the status, demographic characteristics, location, and goals for the placement of every child who is (or within the immediately preceding months, has been) in foster care.	Pg. 55 Stakeholders expressed concern that, because of recent budget cuts , the focus of data analysis and reporting in CWIS has been limited to federally-required data and Federal outcomes. Consequently, agency administrators do not routinely receive the kinds of reports they need for effective management and case decision-making. All stakeholders commenting on this issue agreed that budget cuts have devastated the agency's CWIS data analysis and research efforts. As a result, although there is a great deal of information in FACS, the agency cannot produce reports that provide useful analyses of the information.
Item 25. Provides a process that ensures that each child has a written case plan to be developed jointly with the child's parent(s) that includes the required provisions.	Pg. 58 Stakeholders in all three counties expressed the opinion that parents tend to be fully involved in case planning in those cases in which some type of family group decision-making process is used. However, stakeholders also suggested that many caseworkers are not using family group decision making because of the time constraints imposed by their excessive caseloads (caseloads were reported as including anywhere from 35 to 55 cases depending on the county and/or the caseworker). State-level stakeholders reported that family group decision making is strong in some sites, particularly those that are Community Partnership sites, and that the State has made training in family group decision making available for the last 5 years. However, stakeholders voiced concern that the training will not be useful unless

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	caseloads are reduced so that caseworkers have the time to arrange and participate in the meetings.
<p>Item 31. The State is operating an identifiable quality assurance system that is in place in the jurisdictions where the services included in the CFSP are provided, evaluates the quality of services, identifies strengths and needs of the service delivery system, provides relevant reports, and evaluates program improvement measures implemented.</p>	<p>Pg. 64-65</p> <p>According to the Statewide Assessment, Iowa currently has no Statewide comprehensive, coordinated quality assurance (QA) system that is designed to assess systemic factors and the effectiveness of DHS' service programs. Many participants in focus groups for the Statewide Assessment reported that there is no established, coordinated method by which the quality and effectiveness of child welfare services are evaluated and service quality improvement activities are undertaken. The Statewide Assessment also notes that diminished budget resources and the recent reorganization have reduced the agency's capacity for QA. However, DHS is developing continuing program QA initiatives such as Quality Service Review (QSR), and is moving forward with the child welfare utilization management project.</p> <p>Stakeholders commenting on the issue of QA during the onsite CFSR expressed opinions consistent with information provided in the Statewide Assessment. These stakeholders noted that prior to the extensive budget cuts; the agency had clear procedures in place for case reviews and quality assessments. However, since the budget cuts, the responsibility for QA has been put on supervisors. Stakeholders voiced concern about the ability of supervisors to conduct adequate QA since the caseworker to supervisor ratio is about 11 to 1, which means that most supervisors oversee about 600 cases. In addition, some stakeholders reported that most supervision is administrative and there is a dearth of clinical supervision regarding case practices</p>
<p>Item 32. The State is operating a staff development and training program that supports the goals and objectives in the CFSP, addresses services provided under</p>	<p>Pg. 66 Item 32 is rated as an Area Needing Improvement because, although the State has a well-conceptualized and broad pre-service training curriculum for caseworkers, the training system is not functioning as it should. Specifically, the ability of caseworkers to participate in training in a timely manner has been compromised due to reductions in the frequency of offering the training and the high caseloads that caseworkers carry. Further, in the absence</p>

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<p>titles IV-B and IV-E, and provides initial training for all staff who deliver these services.</p>	<p>of a functioning QA system, the agency is reliant on front-line supervisors to ensure quality casework, but there is not sufficient supervisory training to support supervisors in this process.</p>
<p>Item 33. The State provides for ongoing training for staff that addresses the skills and knowledge base needed to carry out their duties with regard to the services included in the CFSP.</p>	<p>Pg. 67 Item 33 is rated as an Area Needing Improvement because the availability of on-going training has been significantly reduced due to a 75 percent reduction in funds available for training purposes. At the time of the onsite CFSR, stakeholders reported that ongoing training is not readily available to DHS staff.</p> <p>According to the Statewide Assessment, experienced child protective staff members were historically required to attend 4 days of Child Protective Academy training each year. However, this requirement was dropped in State FY 2003 due to cuts in the training budget. The Statewide Assessment also notes that there are no specific ongoing training requirements for social work case managers, although DHS does make some training options available to experienced case managers.</p> <p>Stakeholders commenting on ongoing staff training during the onsite CFSR expressed the following opinions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is a dearth of ongoing training opportunities for caseworkers and supervisors and no funds to pay for the training opportunities that are available. • There is no overarching long-term staff development program involving improving skills and knowledge. • Even if there were numerous ongoing training opportunities, staff would not be able to find the time to attend them because of their extremely large caseloads.
<p>Item 34. The State provides training for current or prospective foster parents, adoptive parents, and staff of State licensed or</p>	<p>Pg. 69 Item 34. The State provides training for current or prospective foster parents, adoptive parents, and staff of State licensed or approved facilities that care for children receiving foster care or adoption assistance under title IV-E that addresses the skills and knowledge base needed to carry out their duties with regard to foster and adopted children.</p>

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<p>approved facilities that care for children receiving foster care or adoption assistance under title IV-E that addresses the skills and knowledge base needed to carry out their duties with regard to foster and adopted children.</p>	<p>The Statewide Assessment also notes that participants in a foster/adoptive parent focus group expressed the following opinions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The current foster parent training is inconsistently delivered. • Foster parents are not adequately prepared to meet the needs of special needs children (85 percent of the children placed in foster care have special needs). • Lack of sufficient training is a causal factor to the instability of placements. • Although there are dedicated case managers who try to help foster parents, ongoing support is not provided because of high case manager caseloads.
<p>Item 35. The State has in place an array of services that assess the strengths and needs of children and families and determine other service needs, address the needs of families in addition to individual children in order to create a safe home environment, enable children to remain safely with their parents when reasonable, and help children in foster and adoptive placements achieve permanency.</p>	<p>Pg. 70 Item 35 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement because recent budget cuts have resulted in significant reductions in the service array, leading to a number of critical services either being eliminated or sharply reduced, particularly with regard to culturally appropriate and bilingual services. Stakeholders reported that these services were available prior to the recent budget cuts.</p> <p>As noted in the Statewide Assessment, the availability of services has been affected by recent budget cuts. Many programs have been eliminated or significantly reduced. Many stakeholders who participated in focus groups, interviews, or surveys conducted as part of the State's self-assessment process, commented on the negative impact budget cuts have had on family centered and family preservation services. Some stakeholders commented that services for older youth such as transition planning and independent living services are not sufficient, and in some places, non-existent. However, the lack of these latter services cannot be attributed solely to budget cuts because provision of these services was problematic prior to the reduction in funds. Also, the State receives funds from the Federal government specifically for independent living services.</p>

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<p>Item 36. The services in item 35 are accessible to families and children in all political jurisdictions covered in the State's CFSP.</p>	<p>Pg. 72 Item 36 is rated as an Area Needing Improvement because services are not available in all areas of the State, particularly in rural areas. For example, a lack of foster family or residential treatment services in some areas of the State often results in children being placed outside their home communities. In addition, DHS budget reductions have resulted in fewer services and consequently long waiting lists to receive services.</p> <p>However, as noted in the Statewide Assessment, Iowa's population distribution makes service delivery particularly problematic in rural areas where the distance and travel time between clients limits the cost-effectiveness of service delivery for providers. Services such as day treatment, specialized treatment, and group care are not available in every community, resulting in children being placed outside of their communities and neighborhood schools. Also, services provided by mental health facilities often require that children are placed a distance from home. Finally, budget reductions have resulted in drastic reductions in services to help children.</p> <p>As noted in the Statewide Assessment, stakeholders who participated in focus groups or surveys as part of the State's self-assessment process noted that the accessibility of services across the State has been negatively impacted by budget reductions. Some stakeholders commented that services to preserve families, reunite families, and promote permanency are available across the State. However, they also noted that urban areas have more services and higher quality services than can be found in rural areas, particularly with regard to substance abuse treatment and mental health services.</p>
<p>Item 37. The services in item 35 can be individualized to meet the unique needs of children and families served by the agency.</p>	<p>Pg. 72 Item 37 is rated as an Area Needing Improvement because services are not routinely meeting the diverse needs of the children and families. Flexibility in designing services to meet the individual needs through "decat" funds has been significantly reduced due to budget cuts.</p> <p>According to the Statewide Assessment, services are individualized and are delivered through</p>

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	<p>programs such as “Decat” and the Clark Partnership for Protecting Children that focus on specialized services to meet the needs of children considered at risk. However, the Statewide assessment notes that the agency’s ability to individualize services has been limited by the elimination or drastic reduction of programs due to recent budget cuts.</p>
<p>Item 38. In implementing the provisions of the CFSP, the State engages in ongoing consultation with tribal representatives, consumers, service providers, foster care providers, the juvenile court, and other public and private child- and family-serving agencies and includes the major concerns of these representatives in the goals and objectives of the CFSP.</p>	<p>Pg. 74 According to the Statewide Assessment, the Division of Behavioral, Developmental, and Protective Services (DBDPS) within DHS is the organizational unit within the State agency responsible for the development, operation, and implementation of the Child and Family Services Plan. DBDPS works in partnership with the DHS Office of Field Operations and Service Delivery Areas to administer Title IV-E and IV-B programs under the Social Security Act. DBDPS employs partnerships with Juvenile Court Services; the Court Improvement Project; other State agencies such as Public Health, Education, Human Rights-Division of Criminal and Juvenile Justice Planning, Inspections and Appeals-licensing staff and Child Advocacy Board; private provider agencies; and other stakeholder groups in effort to plan, implement and monitor programs serving children and families. As noted in the Statewide Assessment, budget reductions and consequent agency reorganization have recently had a negative impact on the ability of DHS to partner with community stakeholders. For example, budget cuts have resulted in less staff being available to attend interagency meetings and participate on various task groups and committees in the community.</p>
<p>Item 43. The State complies with Federal requirements for criminal background clearances as related to licensing or approving foster care and adoptive placements and has in place a case planning process that includes provisions for addressing the safety of</p>	<p>Pg. 79 Stakeholders commenting on this issue noted that national checks are not done due to budget constraints unless the family has lived in another State. Both relatives and non-relatives are subjected to background checks if they are licensed as foster parents.</p>

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<p>foster care and adoptive placements for children.</p>	
<p>Item 44. The State has in place a process for ensuring the diligent recruitment of potential foster and adoptive families that reflect the ethnic and racial diversity of children in the State for whom foster and adoptive homes are needed.</p>	<p>Pg. 80 Stakeholders commenting on this issue during the onsite CFSR were in general agreement that recruitment is not sufficient and does not effectively target families that match the race, ethnicity, and needs of the children in the foster care system. Several stakeholders reported that part of the problem is due to the loss of local recruitment efforts. According to these stakeholders, the counties once had local recruiters on staff, but that due to budget cuts, all formal recruiting is being done at the State level. This means that the personal contacts between the agency and various communities such as the Tribes and the African American communities, are no longer being continuously maintained and reported. In one county, stakeholders noted that there has been no recruitment of ethnic homes since the responsibility for recruiting was shifted to the State level.</p>
<p>Item 45. The State has in place a process for the effective use of cross-jurisdictional resources to facilitate timely adoptive or permanent placements for waiting children.</p>	<p>Pg. 81 It is the responsibility of DHS adoption caseworkers to enter children with termination of parental rights into IAES. A monthly printout of children registered on IAES is generated by DHS and sent to KidSake, which uses this information to register children on the National Adoption Exchange, the Internet photo listing, AdoptUSKids (formerly, Faces of Adoption) and to identify children that should be included in the photo listing book, <i>Iowa's Waiting Child</i>. <i>Iowa's Waiting Child</i> often is sent to families in all parts of the State and to families in other States. It is noted in the Statewide Assessment that because of high caseloads, caseworkers may not be registering children on IAES or referring them to KidSake in a timely manner.</p>